

**Testimony of Barbara J. Turk, M.Div, Director of Food Policy, Office of the Mayor
Before the New York City Council Committee on Community Development
Regarding Community Gardening and Urban Farming**

and

Int. No. 838 - A Local Law to amend the New York City charter, in relation to an urban agriculture advisory board

December 3, 2015

**250 Broadway, 14th Floor, Committee Room
New York City**

Good afternoon. Thank you, Chair Arroyo, and members of the Committee on Community Development. My name is Barbara Turk and I am the Director of Food Policy in the Office of the Deputy Mayor for Health and Human Services for New York City.

I am here to highlight the important role of urban agriculture in our city's food landscape as well as the value that community gardening has for New York City's communities.

Urban agriculture produces only a small portion of the food our city eats, but plays a critical role in communities for whom access to high-quality, affordable, fresh food is limited. Urban farming, which largely takes place at community-run gardens, provides opportunities for residents to connect with nature, improve the environment, beautify public open space, learn about growing and preparing nutritious food, and form lasting intergenerational relationships and social bonds within communities. The city's few commercial farms support the City's environmental goals and offer an economic development opportunity within a niche local food market. Many of our city's community programs, such as DYCD-funded afterschool sites, or DFTA-funded senior centers, have gardens and offer educational programs about farming, the environment, and good food.

Because of the significant value that urban agriculture has for New York City's communities, the City offers a number of initiatives and resources to community gardeners and urban farmers. These programs span a range of agencies, and provide materials, support, and assistance to New Yorkers in starting and maintaining gardens and farms in their neighborhoods.

GreenThumb

GreenThumb, a program of the Department of Parks and Recreation, is the nation's largest urban gardening program. GreenThumb provides technical assistance and material support to 544 community gardens, 545 school gardens and over 20,000 garden members throughout the city. In fact, community gardens account for over 32 acres of parkland in the city.

GreenThumb was created in response to the city's financial crisis of the 1970s, when private owners stopped paying their property taxes and surrendered their land to the City, leaving the City with more land but fewer dollars with which to maintain it. The majority of GreenThumb gardens were derelict vacant lots renovated by volunteers. Since 1978, GreenThumb gardeners have successfully transformed vacant, unattractive, and unsafe plots of public and private land into thriving gardens throughout the five boroughs. These community gardens, now managed by neighborhood residents, improve air quality, biodiversity, and the well-being of residents. Our volunteer gardeners are the backbone of this program and are of diverse ages and backgrounds.

Community gardens provide much-needed green and open space to neighborhoods and schools, used to promote environmental education, nurture intergenerational and intercultural relationships and transform otherwise unused open space. GreenThumb gardens are hubs of neighborhood pride that provide a myriad of environmental, economic and social benefits to the neighborhoods in which they thrive. Some are full-fledged farms, while others are more passive open spaces. The active garden sites play an important role in community building, serving as anchors for local neighborhoods, while making the city safer, healthier, and cleaner.

The GreenThumb program works directly with the neighborhood residents stewarding community gardens. The program provide supplies such as tools, lumber, mulch and compost, and provides technical assistance, including educational workshops which are held every month of the year on topics ranging from gardening basics to more advanced farming techniques and community organizing. GreenThumb also works with local gardeners on important environmental initiatives, such as capturing rainwater and other green infrastructure projects. GreenThumb partners with citywide organizations such as New York Restoration Project, New York Botanical Garden, Partnerships for Parks, ASPCA, Citizens Committee for NYC and Shape Up to bring engaging programming and volunteer activities into our community gardens.

In partnership with NYC Service, last year GreenThumb launched a new Youth Leadership Council to build the next generation of leaders for our community gardens.

Community gardens have a small but critical role in urban agricultural food production. Although the size of GreenThumb community gardens varies from 2,500 square feet to 3 acres, in many of the gardens, at least 50% of the garden is devoted to food production. GreenThumb provides workshops addressing issues directly related to food production, preservation, and marketing, as well as healthy eating and nutrition. In partnership with Just Food, GrowNYC and others, GreenThumb has offered workshops on extending the harvest season, canning and preserving foods, raising chickens for egg production, seed saving, soil health, rainwater harvesting and other important urban agriculture topics.

In recognition of an increasing interest in and demand for access to fresh produce, GreenThumb is helping to increase access to fresh local produce in underserved areas by supporting the creation of new farmers markets at gardens and also helping volunteer gardeners to develop small-scale entrepreneurship programs, most often staffed by young people.

Grow to Learn NYC

Grow to Learn NYC is an initiative of GrowNYC, in partnership with GreenThumb and the Department of Education, having the mission to inspire, facilitate and promote the creation of a school garden in every public school in New York City. Schools work directly with Grow to Learn NYC to ensure that their garden programs are sustainable, responsive to their communities, and transformative for student learning in the cafeteria, the classroom and beyond. Grow to Learn NYC provides the material and financial support to get schools growing, provides technical and professional development support to school gardeners, and makes the scale of New York City school gardening efforts manageable by bringing together city-wide partnerships and resources into one convenient central location. Since launching in February 2011, 545 out of approximately 1,800 NYC schools have registered garden projects with Grow to Learn.

NYCHA Garden and Greening

The New York City Housing Authority's Garden and Greening Program serves low and moderate-income residents across the City's 328 public housing developments. Established in

1963, the 52-year old program provides year-round technical assistance and other resources to thousands of residents and to partners that operate senior, community and day care centers. In 2015, Garden and Greening supported over 700 gardens (roughly half of which are food-producing) and three urban farms, each of which are managed by local community partners. The Program's work is guided by the *Next Generation NYCHA* strategic plan, which includes strategies to improve sustainability, reduce the carbon footprint of the Authority, and increase workforce opportunities for NYCHA residents.

Further supporting the growth of Garden and Greening in public housing communities, the City's *OneNYC* Plan includes a commitment to expand the scale of urban farming ventures and food-producing gardens at NYCHA developments. Once established, new farms are expected to produce approximately four tons of fresh produce and engage an estimated 500 community residents in programming each year while offering a venue for training and service for young NYCHA residents in collaboration with the organization Green City Force.

Department of Environmental Protection's Green Infrastructure Program

New York City's Green Infrastructure Program is a multiagency effort led by the Department of Environmental Protection. DEP and agency partners design, construct and maintain a variety of sustainable green infrastructure practices such as green roofs, rain gardens, and Right-of-way Bioswales on City-owned property such as streets, sidewalks, schools, and public housing. Green infrastructure practices are designed and constructed to manage stormwater runoff when it rains, to prevent stormwater runoff from entering the City's sewer systems. Green Infrastructure also makes the City more sustainable by improving air quality, reducing temperatures in hot summer months, and beautifying neighborhoods.

DEP's Green Infrastructure Grant Program provides funding for the design and construction of sustainable stormwater management practices or green infrastructure on private properties. Projects include rain gardens, permeable pavements, and green roofs, including rooftop farms and other projects with edible plants. For example, in 2011, Lenox Hill Neighborhood House received a grant to build a 2,400 SF green roof. The site grows edible plants including herbs, greens, vines, and tubers, and produce goes to Lenox Hill clients.

Zoning for Rooftop Farms

In 2012, the Department of City Planning proposed and the City Council adopted the Zone Green Text Amendment, which reflected recommendations to amend City regulations to promote green buildings. This included a proposal to allow Greenhouses to be sited on top of industrial, commercial, and school buildings to enable year-round local food production and provide educational opportunities. The Zoning text now allows, by certification of the Chair of the City Planning Commission, a greenhouse to be exempt from floor area and height limits, so long as it is located on top of a building that does not contain residences or sleeping accommodations. These greenhouses must not exceed 25 feet in height, must set back six feet from the roof edge, and must include practical measures to limit water consumption. Applications for certification for a rooftop greenhouse must be delivered to the affected community board when filed.

Building Healthy Communities

To further support the development of urban agriculture and provide resources for communities where access to healthy food is limited, we are launching the Building Healthy Communities initiative, a multi-million dollar public-private partnership committed to improving physical health, mental health, and quality of life in New York City's neighborhoods. The initiative will be focused on three main goals: increasing access to healthy food, increasing opportunities for physical activity and promoting public safety. The initiative will include increased resources for food-producing urban farms, community gardens, school gardens, as well as assistance with establishing food market. The program will also work to activate open space by establishing opportunities for adults and children to walk, run, bike, and play. Resources will be focused in 12 priority neighborhoods: Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brownsville, Canarsie, Central Harlem, Corona, East Harlem, Flushing, Hunts Point, Mariners Harbor, Morrisania, Mott Haven and Stapleton. The program will leverage existing city-funded initiatives, such as the \$285 million commitment to improving 67 of the city's neediest public parks through the Community Parks Initiative, and will work with generous private partners, such as the Laurie M. Tisch Illumination fund.

New York City remains a leader in urban agriculture and greatly values our volunteer gardeners and the impact they have in their communities.

As to Intro 838, we appreciate the Council's interest in this subject, which involves several different agency stakeholders who each perform important roles in furthering the urban agriculture goals we share with the Council. We welcome the opportunity to discuss with you whether an advisory board should be structured in this way, and other issues that could impact on the efficacy of such a board.

Thank you and I'm happy to answer your questions.

Testimony on Urban Agriculture Advisory Board Bill

December 3, 2015

From Greg Todd

Member, Imani Gardens 1680 Pacific Street and 87-91 Schenectady Avenue

Dear Council Members:

I think it might be illuminating for the council to hear the history of two separate community gardens and how the City's actions and inactions have impacted each.

1680 Pacific Street at Schenectady Avenue in the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn has been a community garden since 2011, when HPD signed a license agreement with the garden's members. Since then we have made major improvements in what was once an abandoned weed choked lot. We have put 13 raised beds in the garden, added a water storage tank, built a polycarbonate greenhouse and in general made the lot a positive addition to the community. We have over 60 members on our mailing list and have conducted numerous workshops and talks about urban agriculture at the garden. These projects were supported financially and with donations from The Citizens Committee, Green Thumb, NYRP, The Green Guerillas and the gardeners own funds. With no warning or advance notice, in February HPD included this lot on a list of 180 sites available for developers to build affordable housing on. To date nothing has happened but the effect of this precipitous act by HPD has been to dishearten the gardeners and stop improvements planned for the garden.

89 Schenectady Avenue, a community garden near 1680 Pacific, is located between two lots owned by NYRP. In June the gardeners learned that a referee was selling the lot to collect taxes due the City. For three months prior to June, the Dept of Finance had been mailing notices of an impending sale to the deceased head of a non-profit group that owned the lot. The gardeners had no time to challenge the sale because the objection period had expired by the time we learned of the sale. NYRP's requests to be notified of an impending sale as an interested party had been declined by the Dept of Finance according to NYRP accounts. Hence the lot which includes an 80 foot weeping willow tree and a large chicken coop and sits at the middle of the Imani Garden, was sold on August 24th for \$365,000. Needless to say, the gardeners were devastated and improvements in the garden have ground to a halt. We suspect in large part due to community protests, the new owner has yet to develop the lot but did recently put it back on the market for \$690,000.

Clearly 2015 was a horrible year for the gardeners in Crown Heights. This tale of woe clearly points toward the need for an Urban Agriculture Advisory Board with legal standing to stop these ruinous actions by the City and their devastating consequences for our gardens.

Aresh Javadi,

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Executive Director: [More Gardens!](#)

Artist & Educator: [Aresh.Info](#)

Board Member: [NYCCGC \(NYC Community Garden Coalition\)](#)

Community Gardener & Activist: [Children's Magical Garden](#)

'Nature based, artist, educator & activist: rooted in community'

How do you interpret "Adisory" and how effective is it? How much time and energy do you want to give to be selected to advise the powers that be, choosing what happens to our land VS being part of a preserved community gardens, with a community gardener led board that makes decisions for our own community land?

Community boards can be a good example of how originally they were to be elected with actual decision-making power that became a selected board with advising powers.

NYCCGC has been working for more than a decade including Speaker Quinn and Mark-Viverito and have we came up with one of many examples such as the "Community Garden Partnership ([link](#)) agreement to preserve community gardens under a majority community gardener's board".

Community Garden Partnership ([link](#))

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Qt83nv9_y_mabTNMiXPF5Bui7FLzJMO3Opk9insH2GU/edit?pli=1

Just Decision-making body rooted with a Majority community gardening board alongside Preservation.

Present Local law advises the mayor: "of long-term planning and sustainability on any matter relating to agriculture in the city, including the identification of existing and potential agricultural food production sites, opportunities to increase local agricultural food production, impediments to local agricultural food production, and urban agriculture training programs and expansion thereof;"

My suggestion for this hearing and the councilmembers Johnson and Koo writing this, who clearly support Urban Ag, is that a deeper open town hall discussion in regards to endangered gardens as well as preservation and truly empowering the community and their grassroots garden members is needed ASAP. After that it is time to set the ink in motion to create a just and long-term solution!

Again all initiatives regarding Urban Ag must centrally include community gardeners and their representatives especially NYCCGC.

It thus benefits for those initiatives to include solutions to preserve, create and empower community gardeners

I got my start in urban farming on Eagle Street Rooftop Farm when it opened in 2009. I apprenticed and worked there for three years. I ran the education program, exposing hundreds of New York City kids to urban agriculture. I learned the basics of urban farming and the importance of the upstate-downstate connection as we try to change the way New Yorkers eat. When people in my neighborhood started meeting in 2011 to plan what would become 462 Halsey Community Garden, I didn't know that this burgeoning understanding of the important rooftop-sidewalk connection in urban agriculture would take over my whole life.

Since 462 Halsey opened its gates - gates that remain open to the public all day everyday from April to November - I have worked with a diverse group of people to transform a lot full of garbage into an active community center with over 500 square feet of organic food growing space and a compost project that diverts around 2000 pounds of food every month from landfills to garden beds. In partnership with Grow NYC, we host a weekly CSA program that is utilized by around 100 households every week. We grow fruits, vegetables and herbs that we share free of charge with anyone who wants them. Our bees pollinate the neighborhood and provide delicious, medicinal honey for our community. We run education programs with neighborhood schools, serve as a gallery for local and international artists and also have really awesome parties.

The neighbors who come together as community in our garden bring all different experiences, skills and personalities to the space. Some, like me, are 20 somethings who are new to agriculture. Others- our older, wiser, members are West Indian or from the south- they came up growing food. And then there are the children - the new generation that will know how to grow food, create life-giving soil and tend bees, despite growing up in this concrete jungle. Community gardens nurture vital intergenerational skill-sharing. If we as a city are serious about urban agriculture, then we need to be serious about growing farmers. That happens at community gardens. These are the spaces that will grow our kids into wise elders with green thumbs who know how to feed their neighbors.

462 Halsey is one of ^{at least 18} 17 gardens on the HPD list for development as part of the mayor's faux affordable housing plan. Our communities desperately need affordable housing. But I also know that my beloved garden could be bulldozed to create condos with two or three apartments designated for a family of four that cost \$3200 a month. That is not affordable housing in Bed Stuy - or anywhere else. To pretend that our choice is between community gardens and slightly less-expensive housing is a red herring. We deserve both, and there are smart, dedicated New Yorkers willing to work to make both a reality. The hundreds of active community gardens in New York City are prime examples of what New Yorkers can do to make their city a better, more just and more liveable place.

I used to tell some of the kids I worked with that my favorite thing about urban farming is that it is so rewarding. It is a vital tool in the fight for social, environmental and food justice. Fighting to make the world a better place is hard, exhausting work - but when farming is your tool, at least you get some vegetables at the end. What's more, you get to nurture other living things and help them grow. At community gardens, not only do we grow food and innovate waste management systems, we foster community. We come together to make our city better, greener and healthier. We need your help to protect our community gardens. I promise if you help us keep our spaces, we will continue our work, block by block, to turn New York into a model city for urban agriculture.



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December 3, 2015

Re: Int. No. 838, Urban Agriculture Advisory

Thank you to the committee and the sponsors of the bill for creating this time and space for advocates to come together on the subject of urban agriculture. I am hopeful that today's hearing will lead to more conversations and a more structured engagement between the government entities we need to facilitate agricultural activities in New York City and those that engage in these activities by growing food, keeping bees, creating soil from organic waste via composting, running markets where backyard and community gardeners can sell their bounty and so much more. Agriculture in the city is a vibrant, local and regenerative infrastructure, practiced as a craft and a business. I commend you for recognizing that, and look forward to conversations through which the broadness swath of regulatory and policy issues each of our urban agriculture practices touches becomes a regular subject in the council.

I am here today to speak about what I know as the director of 596 Acres, New York's community land access advocacy organization. We connect neighbors with the information they need to create new pocket parks, community gardens and community farms. These are among the diversity of forms that agriculture takes in the City but certainly not comprehensive. New York City also has private growing operations on roofs in basements, it has markets that organize small and mid-size growers into marketplaces and, of course, New Yorkers grow food in their own backyards and keep bees on their own roofs.

Since 2011, 596 Acres has facilitated the creation of 34 new community places¹ where there were once vacant lots. In total, these amount to over 7 acres of new green space in neighborhoods that need it -- a total area larger than Union Square Park. Twelve of these spaces have been made permanent through transfers to the Parks Department or leases with public authorities. We saved two additional spaces from post-tax lien sale foreclosure by transferring them to the Brooklyn Queens Land Trust² and continue fighting to preserve three others that were illegally threatened with evictions

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Manhattan:

227 Garden (West 115th) (February 2015) (Parks)
Harlem Valley Garden (January 2014) (HPD)
Electric Ladybug (April 2014) (HPD)
St. Nicholas Miracle Garden (April 2013) (Parks)
Siempre Verde (November 2012) (HPD)

Queens:

Smiling Hogshead Ranch (August 2014) (MTA)
Edgemere Farm (June 2013) (Parks)

Brooklyn:

A Small Green Patch (November 2011) (HPD)
462 Halsey (December 2011) (HPD)
Ashford Variety Garden (January 2014) (HPD)
Chestnut Street Garden (January 2014) (HPD)
Ashford Teaching Garden, (March - July 2014) (HPD)
Glenmore Grows (March - July 2014) (HPD)
Ten Neighbors (February 2015) (HPD)
BACDYS Community Garden (February 2015) (MTA)
Warwick Greenery Glow (December 2015) (Parks)
1278 Myrtle (July 2014) (Parks)
Mandela Park (September 2014) (HPD)
Q Gardens (December 2014) (MTA)
61 Franklin (March 2013) (Parks)
Saratoga Farm (April 2013) (HPD)
Grand Street Community Garden (June 2013) (Parks)
Keap Fourth Community Garden (June 2013) (Parks)
Pirate's Cove (May 2013) (HPD)
Vinegar Hill (June 2013) (Parks)
EL Garden, Bushwick (October 2013) (HPD)
La Casita Verde (November 2013) (HPD)
GreenSpace on 4th (December 2013) (DEP)
Maple Street Community Garden (March 2013) (ownership in dispute; see Rachel Holliday Smith, [Deed for Disputed Maple Street Community Garden is 'Dubious,' Judge Says, Nov. 13, 2015,](http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20151113/prospect-lefferts-gardens/deed-for-disputed-maple-street-community-garden-is-dubious-judge-says)
<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20151113/prospect-lefferts-gardens/deed-for-disputed-maple-street-community-garden-is-dubious-judge-says>)
Java Street (February 2012) (HPD)
Patchen Community Square (May 2012) (HPD)
South Brooklyn Children's Garden (August 2012) (HPD)
Myrtle Village Green (August 2012) (DEP)
100 Quincy (December 2012) (Parks)

Bronx:

Hill Street Community Garden in Councilmember Maria Del Carmen Arroyo's district will be #35, soon! (DOT)

² **1100 Bergen Community Garden**, see Rachel Holliday Smith, [Bergen Street Community Garden Gets Protection From Development](http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20150204/crown-heights/bergen-street-community-garden-gets-protection-from-development), Feb. 4, 2015,
<http://www.dnainfo.com/new-york/20150204/crown-heights/bergen-street-community-garden-gets-protection-from-development>

by developers; while ultimate preservation for those three spaces has not been attained – yet! – the evictions have been definitively stopped.³

Through our online tool – **LivingLotsNYC.org** – New Yorkers and the committee’s future members can identify most existing and potential agricultural food production sites. The map includes all vacant municipal land, as well as private parcels offered by owners for community uses that can include agricultural production, and available MTA parcels. It also shows existing community-managed spaces: gardens, parks and farms on public land, as well as those on private or land trust land and open to the public by their stewards. I encourage you to explore the tool and be in touch with any questions, clarifications or suggestions for improvements.

The universe of activities that can be defined as “urban agriculture” is broad, spanning from neighbor-tended community gardens, to production farms, to goats being used instead of pesticides to keep the weeds down. What unites urban agriculture practitioners is the need for space to practice: land access is fundamental to any community-based or entrepreneurial agriculture activity. Land disposition for municipal real estate may need its own focused committee to address a multiplicity of community needs, not just the needs of urban agriculture practitioners. I urge that such a committee be created, and focused on land disposition.

The Urban Agriculture Advisory, as proposed today, will be a great collaborator to practitioners of urban agriculture no matter the underlying ownership of the land. There are regulatory and collaborative hurdles for programs that a cross-sector advisory with members of City Agencies will be well-positioned to address.

The land access issues are more complex, and I believe they require greater focus and collaboration with other community advocates working on the development of permanently community-controlled affordable housing, of parks, and of other community facilities. Such a committee could be charged with studying the entire municipal real estate inventory, altering the process through which the Department of Citywide Administrative Services assigns land to agencies that frequently then hold it with no development for decades, and assessing the “surplus” real estate auction through which our public lands and buildings are currently regularly offered for purchase by private developers.

Thank you for inviting me to testify today and I look forward to further dialogue with the committee and its members.

nt ; **Merrick-Marsden Community Garden**, see [596 Acres + Mohen & Segal + Merrick Marsden Neighborhood Association + Brooklyn Queens Land Trust = another forever space for the community \(in Queens!\)](http://596acres.org/en/news/2014/01/23/596-acres-mohen-segal-merrick-marsden-neighborhood-association-brooklyn-queen-s-land-trust-another-forever-space-for-the-community-in-queens/), Jan . 24, 2014, <http://596acres.org/en/news/2014/01/23/596-acres-mohen-segal-merrick-marsden-neighborhood-association-brooklyn-queen-s-land-trust-another-forever-space-for-the-community-in-queens/>

³ See Nathan Tempey, [3 Beloved Brooklyn Community Gardens Win Important Victories](http://gothamist.com/2015/11/18/community_gardens_ftw.php), Nov. 18, 2015, http://gothamist.com/2015/11/18/community_gardens_ftw.php

Testimony before the Committee on Community Development,
Thursday, December 3, 2015, in relation to:
Int. No. 838 - In relation to an urban agriculture advisory board.

Sara Hobel

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I am Sara Hobel, Executive Director of the Horticultural Society of New York. I would like to thank the Committee on Community Development for holding this hearing and for giving us the opportunity to testify. We whole-heartedly support Council Members Johnson and Koo in their efforts to amend the New York City charter, in relation to an urban agriculture advisory board and I thank you both for putting forth this proposed amendment to the City Charter.

The Horticultural Society of New York has been promoting the need for the strong connection between urban dwellers and plants since 1902. We have long advocated for a broad understanding and approach to incorporating urban agriculture into our city planning so that it can be a part of our daily lives. Human civilization began with the cultivation of plants...as our world becomes more urbanized, opportunities for a direct connection to growing plants have greatly diminished...especially for those who are economically disadvantaged. The outcomes of this disconnection grow more apparent each year: Obesity, diabetes, asthma, high blood pressure, the loss of cultural heritage, and an overall loss of the well-documented spiritual, physical and mental health benefits of living with regular and proximate access to the natural world.

Since the early 1980's, The Horticultural Society has provided social service programs to populations in need throughout the City. We teach in over 25 public schools and have built over 60 school gardens. We provide teachers accredited professional development courses to allow them to incorporate plants and gardens into their curriculum. We build gardens in supportive housing and provide weekly programs for residents on integrating the garden into their daily lives. We are the country's leading organization in providing horticultural therapy to the prison population: we run the country's largest horticultural therapy program – on Rikers Island – serving over 400 detainees and sentenced individuals each year. We run an aftercare transitional employment program for ex-offenders engaging them in building and caring for gardens, greenspaces, and public plazas in low-income communities. We provide technical assistance to community gardens, performing remediation services, building raised beds and teaching garden skills.

These programs have served to reconnect children, youth, adults and families to the cultivation of plants, including the concomitant benefits of improved nutrition through the preparation of meals from fresh vegetables and fruits, improved kinesthetic and science learning through direct engagement with the natural world, improved artistic expression through engagement with the “awe” of natural beauty and discovery, and improved mental and physical health through the hands-on, immersive experience of growing plants. We have pioneered a holistic approach to connecting urban communities to the importance of agriculture in the urban environment. Our programs incorporate, educational, vocational, nutritional, therapeutic and spiritual elements that provide a well-rounded understanding of why the practice of growing plants and food is essential to human well-being.

The sum of our experience with these populations over the many years has strengthened our conviction and our mission: to ensure that our great City provides equitable opportunity for residents to benefit from a direct connection to plants....benefits that are as important to our city life as public school, public transportation, public health and public libraries, to name a few. To ensure that our city's residents have equal access to all the benefits of plants, we strongly urge the creation of an on-going urban agriculture advisory board.

Thank you.



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BROOKLYN, NY 11207

To: Committee on Community Development, New York City Council

Re: Int. 0838, *A Local Law to amend the New York City Charter, in relation to an urban agriculture advisory board.*

I am testifying on behalf of *East New York Farms!*, a food justice and urban agriculture project in East New York, Brooklyn. Since 1998 we have been working with East New York residents to grow food, run farmers markets, and start and maintain community gardens and farms. We provide things like seeds, soil, plants, and other supplies to over 300 gardeners in the neighborhood who grow in 30 community gardens, plus backyard gardens. Fifty (50) of those gardeners sell food at our farmers market, one of the largest youth-run markets in a low-income community. This year we also started a ½-acre farm at the Louis H. Pink Houses, a NYCHA development in East New York, with all of the food given away free of charge to Pink Houses residents. We believe that growing food in our community is a powerful act, providing not just nutrition, but also education, cultural preservation, environmental benefits, and a stronger sense of community. Suffice to say, we were pleased to hear about the proposed amendment to create an urban agriculture advisory board and wish to share some of our thoughts of how we can ensure that this board can further the needs of communities like East New York that are reshaping their local food systems.

Most importantly, we want to make sure that community gardens remain in the forefront of any conversation about urban agriculture in New York City. While any single garden may not look as impressive as a rooftop farm or a hydroponic greenhouse, when taken as a whole, community gardens constitute a much larger part of our local food system than any of the more high-visibility farm projects. Community gardens are also an important part of the legacy of land stewardship in some of the communities hit hardest by redlining, arson, abandonment, and neglect. Community gardens bring together residents of all ages and all backgrounds--in East New York you will find gardeners from the American South, the Caribbean, West Africa, and Bangladesh, all working together in the same space to feed their families and neighbors. This proposed advisory board must take an active role in preserving these spaces for local food production by community residents.

We appreciate the effort to bring a broad range of city agencies to the table to address issues of urban agriculture. We would also like to encourage the council to consider other agencies that could have an interest in and impact on urban agriculture in New York City. The Department of Sanitation has been a key partner for us and many other urban farms, helping to distribute massive quantities of compost as well as support the training of master composters. The Department of Environmental Protection should also be at the table, considering the benefits that urban agriculture could have on our overburdened sewer system by collecting rainwater and allowing rainfall to permeate the soil. We also believe that some of the agencies and institutions holding large amounts of public land should be at the table. Gardening and farming in NYCHA communities, public schools, and colleges would bring a wide range of benefits to New York City residents, and there are many examples of these types of farms in existence today.

Finally, we want to see the appointed members of the board comprised of a diverse range of practitioners from around the city. Urban agriculture takes on many forms, from the backyard garden or rooftop beehive to the NYCHA farm or the greenhouse in an elementary school. We want to make sure that the skills, views, and needs of low-income communities of color have a voice on this board so that, in addition to increasing local food production, we can seek to achieve food justice in our city.

Thank you for your consideration.

David Vigil
East New York Farms! Project Director
david@eastnewyorkfarms.org

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SARA HOBEL

Address: _____

I represent: The Horticultural Society of NY

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 838 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: Dec/3/2015

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Aresh JAVADI

Address: _____

29 Clinton St. NY NY

I represent: _____

MORE Gardens!

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/3/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gustavo Perez

Address: _____

110 William Street, NY, NY 10038

I represent: _____

NYC SBS

Address: _____

110 William Street, NY, NY 10038

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 0838 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/3

Name: DAVID VIGIL (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 613 New Lots Ave, BKLYN

I represent: East New York Farms I

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/3/15

Name: Alice Forbes Spear (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 975A GATES AVE #1 BK 11221

I represent: 462 Halsey Community Garden

Address: 462 Halsey Brooklyn 11233

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

[]

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 838 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Greg Tolo (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 866 J Park Place Brooklyn NY 11216

I represent: Jugni Garden

Address: 1680 Pacific St

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 838 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: PAULA Z. SEGAL / 596 ACRES

Address: 540 President St. Bklyn 11215

I represent: 596 ACRES, INC.

Address: _____

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 12/3/15

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Carlos Martinez

Address: 830 5th Ave

I represent: NYC Parks

Address: Central Park

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: BARBARA TURK

Address: _____

I represent: Deputy Mayor for Health &

Address: Human Services

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms